

ESSAY

ON THE

TREATMENT AND MANAGEMENT

OF

SLAVES.

WRITTEN FOR THE SEVENTH ANNUAL FAIR OF THE SOUTHERN
CENTRAL AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY.

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MANAGEMENT OF SLAVES.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

HISTORY teaches the existence of Slavery, from the earliest periods of time.

It is at least coeval with the records of human society. It prevailed in all the greatest and most civilized nations of antiquity. The earliest glimpses of Egyptian life exhibit pictures of bondage. The oldest monuments of human labor upon her soil, everlastingly perpetuate both her greatness and the extent of that system of Slavery by which such greatness was achieved.

Abraham, the father of the faithful and founder of the Jewish Nation, was the purchaser and owner of hundreds of Slaves. Babylon and Tyre were markets for the sale of men. The Fir-trees and Cedars of Lebanon were cut and hewed by the *servants* of Hiram, and brought to Joppa in floats by sea ; thence carried

to Jerusalem by the *servants* of the king of Israel. The Temple of Solomon was arrayed in all its glory, by the mighty power of this system, directed by the highest wisdom.

In Attica, Laconia, and all the other prominent States of classic Greece, the slave population was greater than the free, and the same was true of Rome in her most virtuous days.

Slavery was established and sanctioned by divine authority; and ever since the decree went forth, that the descendants of Canaan should be "servants of servants," slavery has existed in a variety of forms, and in nearly all nations; until now, in the midst of the nineteenth century, we find ourselves the owners of three and a half millions of this peculiar race, without any agency on our part.

Being thus providentially, as it were, endowed with the responsibilities as well as advantages, which necessarily arise from this fore-ordained connexion of the races, the management and treatment which shall best subserve the welfare and interest of both, becomes one of the most important practical inquiries that can possibly engage our attention.

In attempting an essay upon this subject, we can gather but little aid from the long historical record which we have of the institution, for although we learn that slaves were nearly always employed in labor, we yet see no account of how they were clothed, or fed, or find any data of comparative results of different modes of treatment, or labor, whereby we can be guided in

our search after a system comprising the greatest benefits. We must therefore rely upon the observation, experience, and practice, of the present time, as the only sources of useful and correct information upon the subject.

The writer has been accustomed to slavery from his earliest days, and for thirty years has been much interested in their management, both on plantations and public works, and has therefore been prompted by his own interests, as well as inclination, to try every reasonable mode of management, treatment, living and labor: and the results of a long experience have fully satisfied him, and proven beyond doubt, that the best interests of all parties are most promoted by a kind and liberal treatment on the part of the owner, and the requirement of proper discipline and strict obedience on the part of the slave. Indeed, the Creator seems to have planted in the negro an innate principle of protection against the abuse of arbitrary power; and it is this law of nature, which imperatively associates the true interest of the owner with the good treatment and comfort of the slave. Hence abuses and harsh treatment carry their own antidote, as all such cases recoil upon the head of the owner. Every attempt to force the slave beyond the limits of reasonable service, by cruelty or hard treatment, so far from extorting more work, only tends to make him unprofitable, unmanageable; a vexation and a curse.

It being, therefore, so manifestly against the interest of all parties, as well as opposed to the natural feelings

of humanity, and refinement, and the civilization of the age, a case of cruelty or abuse of a slave by his owner, is seldom known, and universally condemned.

NEGRO HOUSES.

Among the first objects that occupy the attention of the planter, in the settlement of a new place, is the selection of a proper location for his buildings. This should always be done with great care and with an especial view to health. Good water is indispensable, and should be obtained at almost any cost, as without it, there can be no permanent health. It should be obtained from wells or springs, if possible; but if that cannot be done, then proper cisterns should be constructed, and placed to receive the rain water from the buildings, by which means a constant supply of healthy water may be kept on hand.

The houses should be placed, if possible, under the shades of the native forest; but where that cannot be done, the china, or mulberry, or some quick growth should be immediately transplanted, so as to cover the buildings, in some degree, from the rays of the summer's sun. The buildings should be placed about two feet above the ground, so that the air can pass freely under them, and also be well ventilated with doors and windows. They should be sufficiently large, say at least sixteen by twenty feet, and but one family should be put in a house: there is nothing more injurious to health or demoralizing in feeling, than crowding them

together. They had much better sleep in the open air than in crowded, tight houses. Each house or family should be furnished with suitable bedding and blankets ; for while a proper outfit costs a few dollars in the beginning, it saves twice as much in the end—adds greatly to the comfort and health of the slave, and enables him much better to perform the labor required.

FEEDING OF SLAVES.

In former years the writer tried many ways and expedients to economize in the provision of slaves, by using more of the vegetable and cheap articles of diet, and less of the more costly and substantial. But time and experience have fully proven the error of a stinted policy ; and for many years the following uniform mode has been adopted, with much success and satisfaction, both to the owner and the slave.

The allowance now given per week to each hand—men, women, boys, and girls that are large enough to go into the field to work—is five pounds of good clean bacon, and one quart of molasses, with as much good bread as they require ; and in the fall or sickly seasons of the year, or in sickly places, the addition of one pint of strong coffee, sweetened with sugar, every morning before going to work. These provisions are given out on some designated night of each week ; and for families the allowance is put together ; but to single hands it is given to each separately, and they then unite in squads or messes, and have their meat cooked for them,

by a woman who is detailed for that purpose, or keep it to themselves, as they please. Their bread is baked daily in loaves, by a woman who is kept for that duty. Each house or family should have a garden attached for raising the family vegetables.

This mode of allowancing, relieves the owner from much trouble in daily supervising their provisions, and is much more satisfactory to the slaves. Under this system of treatment, a word of complaint in relation to their living is seldom heard. Some planters, however, differ on this subject, and prefer the plan of cooking and eating at one common table; and it is possible that, with a small number of hands, and where the owner is willing to devote a good deal of attention to that matter, he may save a small amount. But it will not be as satisfactory, and he will probably not gain enough to pay for the trouble. Children, of course, must be fed and attended as their wants require: they are not likely to be neglected, as they pay a good interest upon the amount of care and expense bestowed upon them.

NEGRO CLOTHING.

The proper and usual quantity of clothes for plantation hands, is two suits of cotton for spring and summer, and two suits of woollen for winter; four pairs of shoes, and three hats, which, with such articles of dress as the negro merits, and the owner chooses to give, make up the year's allowance. Neatness in dress is important to the health, comfort, and pride of a negro,

all of which should be encouraged by the owner. They should be induced to think well of themselves ; and the more pride and self-respect you can instil into them, the better they will behave, and the more serviceable they will be: so they should always be aided and encouraged in dressing, and their own peculiar fancies indulged to a reasonable extent.

HOURS OF WORK.

In the winter time, and in the sickly season of the year, all hands should take breakfast before leaving their houses. This they can do and get to work by sunrise, and stop no more until 12 o'clock ; then rest one hour for dinner, then work until night. In the spring and summer they should go to work at light, and stop at 8 o'clock for breakfast, then work until 12 o'clock and stop two hours for dinner, and work from 2 o'clock till night. All hands stop on Saturday at 12 o'clock, and take the afternoon for cleaning up their houses and clothes, so as to make a neat appearance on Sunday morning.

TASK WORK.

The usual custom of planters, is to work without tasks during the cultivation of their crop ; but in gathering cotton, tasks are common, and experience has proven that whenever work is of that kind or character that it can be properly parcelled out into tasks, it is much better to do so. If the overseer has judgment,

he will get more work, and the negro will be better satisfied; he will generally make an effort, and gain time to devote to his own jobs or pleasures.

NEGRO CROPS.

It was at one period, much the custom of planters to give to each hand a small piece of land, to cultivate on his own account, if he chose to do so; but this system has not been found to result well. It gives an excuse for trading, and encourages a traffic, by the slaves, on their own account, and presents a temptation and opportunity, during the process of gathering, for an unscrupulous fellow to mix a little of his master's produce with his own. It is much better to give each hand, whose conduct has been such as to merit it, an equivalent in money at the end of the year; it is much less trouble, and more advantage to both parties.

DISCIPLINE.

In regard to the general management, or discipline on plantations or public works, it is of great consequence to have perfect system and regularity, and a strict adherence to the rules that may be adopted for the government of the place. Each hand should know his duty, and be required to perform it; but as before intimated, the owner has nothing to gain by oppression or over-driving, but something to lose; for he cannot, by such means, extort more work. But still, if it becomes necessary to punish the negro for not doing his

duty, or the violation of rules, it does not make him revengeful, as it would an Indian or white man, but it rather tends to win his attachment and promote his happiness and well being. Slaves have no respect or affection for a master who indulges them over-much, or who, from fear or false humanity fails to assume that degree of authority necessary to promote industry and enforce good order. At the same time, proper and suitable indulgences and privileges should be granted, for the gratification and amusement of the negro; but they should always be exercised by special permission, for they are a people ever ready to practice upon the old maxim, of "give an inch and take an ell."

Negroes are by nature tyrannical in their dispositions; and if allowed, the stronger will abuse the weaker; husbands will often abuse their wives, and mothers their children, so that it becomes a prominent duty of owners and overseers, to keep peace, and prevent quarreling and disputes among them; and summary punishment should follow any violation of this rule.

Slaves are also a people that enjoy religious privileges. Many of them place much value upon it, and to every reasonable extent, that advantage should be allowed them. They are never injured by preaching, but thousands become wiser and better people, and more trustworthy servants by their attendance at church. Religious services should be provided and encouraged on every plantation. A zealous and vehement style, both in doctrine and manner, is best adapt-

ed to their temperament; they are good believers in mysteries and miracles; ready converts, and adhere with much pertinacity to their opinions when formed.

No card playing, or gambling of any description should be allowed, under severe penalties. And the Maine liquor law should be rigidly enforced on every estate.

MARRYING AMONG SLAVES.

Taking wives and husbands among their fellow servants at home, should be as much encouraged as possible; and although intermarrying with those belonging to other estates should not be absolutely prohibited, yet it is always likely to lead to difficulties and troubles, and should be avoided as much as possible. They cannot live together as they ought, and are constantly liable to separation, in the changing of property. It is true they usually have but little ceremony in forming these connexions; and many of them look upon their obligation to each other very lightly; but in others again, is found a degree of faithfulness, fidelity, and affection, which owners admire; and hence, they always dislike to separate those manifesting such traits of character.

SICKNESS.

Proper and prompt attention, in cases of sickness, is a vastly important matter among slaves. Many plantations are inconvenient to medical aid, therefore own-

ers and overseers should always understand the treatment of such common cases as usually occur on places under their charge. This is easily done, and many times a single dose, of some mild and well understood medicine, given at the beginning of a complaint, removes the cause, and effects a cure at once, when delay or neglect might render it a serious case. A few common medicines, with plain and proper directions pasted on each bottle, should be kept on all plantations.

A bountiful supply of red pepper should be cultivated, and kept on hand and used freely, in damp sections, where sore throats are apt to prevail, and also in all fall complaints. It acts by creating a glow over the whole body, without any narcotic effect ; it produces a general arterial excitement, and prevents in a considerable degree, that languor and apathy of the system, which renders it so susceptible to chills and fevers ; it may be given in any way or form which their taste or fancy may dictate.

The writer does not suppose that the foregoing views are entirely new or novel, for a large portion of his fellow citizens have more or less experience upon the subject. But it is only by thus compiling our experience, with what we can glean from others, and carefully comparing results, and drawing correct inferences, that the great problem can be solved, of how the reciprocal duties between master and slave can be best discharged, so as to promote the greatest good to the greatest number of all concerned.

Furthermore, by communicating our actual experience and daily practice upon this subject, to the public, it may, perchance, remove some of the wild delusions and erroneous impressions which exist in the minds of a portion of the Northern people, and which can only exist, from a want of correct information. Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe, a recent writer of much distinction and ability, but wholly unacquainted, practically with the institution, has unfortunately given to the world, in her recent book, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," a variety of *sketches of fancy*, in relation to the treatment of the negroes of the South, which only exist in a prolific imagination, frenzied by the visionary horrors of slavery, and the terrible misrepresentations and falsehoods, which have been imposed upon her for truths. She has undoubtedly been much deceived; and has aimed a blow at slavery, and slaveholders, without stopping to consider from whence the institution came, or suggesting any reasonable mode to remedy what she calls the evil.

It is truly unfortunate, both for the public and the slave, that such books should emanate from high places. They are well calculated to excite the sympathies, and distress the mind of many honest and worthy people, over the supposed cruelties and abuses of the blacks, that do not exist in reality. And it does injury to the slave, by making it the duty of owners, to prevent the circulation of the book among them, and requiring a more rigid police for that purpose. And in prohibiting this work, they are apt to be deprived of

other books of a religious character, which they might enjoy at pleasure, if these incendiary works were not in circulation. The professed objects of such efforts, are to benefit the slave, but the practical result is to do him an injury.

Under this system of management and treatment, which I have attempted to detail, and which differs but little from the common practice of the country in its main features, the owner receives a good income upon the property, and the slaves are generally a happy and contented people.

They have but few cares on their minds, and no provision to make for to-morrow. The thought of a starving family never disturbs their dreams, for they have the strongest guarantee in the direct interest of their owner, that they will be provided for, both in food and raiment.

The slave also knows, that if he is sick, he will be properly attended to, that he may the sooner recover, and resume his duties; that if his children are sick, they too will be taken care of, for the money they are soon to be worth. As long as owners are governed by their interest, the slaves have good security for a comfortable support.

Will Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe turn her talents and attention for a moment to a comparative examination of the situation and condition of the negro, in his own free native country, and on the plantation of the South? In the former, it is true, he has the name of

freedom, but the *name* is all; he has none of the privileges, comforts, or necessities of civilized life; and in the scale of intelligence, ranges but little above the wild beast of the forest, while the negro of the South has the *name* of slavery, but is in reality comparatively *free*, and in the enjoyment of christian privileges in civilized society, with a protection and support secured to him by the direct interest of his master. A complete investigation and correct information would certainly modify the extreme views of the fair authoress herself, and go very far to satisfy every friend of the Ethiopian race, that the situation and condition of the slaves of this country, are far superior and preferable to that of their brethren in their native land.

It is well known, that some few years ago, William Thompson, from Scotland, travelled through this section of the United States, and labored a considerable time for his living; and upon his return home, published a history of his journey, which was received as authority where he was known, and in which he states, that "he had witnessed slavery in most of the slaveholding States; that he had lived for weeks among negroes on cotton plantations; and he asserts that he never beheld one fifth of the real suffering that he had seen among the laboring poor in England." And he further says: That the members of the same family of negroes are not so much scattered, as are those of the working men in Scotland, whose necessities compel them to separate at an age when the American slave is running about, gathering health and strength.

And another eminent writer of extensive information in regard to the negroes in Africa, says: The greatest blessing that could be bestowed upon them, would be to transport them across the Atlantic to the shores of America. Though they might be perpetual bondsmen, still they would emerge from darkness into light—from barbarism to civilization—from idolatry to christianity—in short, from death to life.

Then may it well be asked, of what has the slave of the South, or his true friend, to complain?

There is no country, and no place upon the face of this earth, where the negro race have such security for a wholesome living, as the slaves in the United States.

In view, then, of all these things, both the slave and the master have reason to be satisfied with their lot. And while duty and obedience should be required of the slave, the master should “render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s,” and should ever hold in remembrance the divine precept; “masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a master in heaven, and ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children. They shall be your bondsmen forever: but thou shalt not rule over them with rigor, but shall fear thy God.”

NOTE TO FIRST EDITION.

The writer has omitted any discussion of the management best adapted to develop manufacturing or mechanical skill in the slave, as there is a general and very proper disposition among slave-holders to leave the trades and arts to the white population.

But I was forcibly reminded of their capacity for such employments, upon calling at the printing office for this Essay, where I found it in the hands of a black boy,* who was printing it, and a black girl who was folding, arranging and stitching it: both slaves, and both, having been told the nature and subject of the pamphlet, were striving to do it in their best style. These facts seemed so appropriate to the general subject, that, by leave of the publisher, I mention them, and ask a comparison of the mechanical execution of the work, with that of those printed in any other portion of the country.

Under our mild and proper system of treatment, many of the slaves become excellent mechanics, and frequently reach a degree of perfection, in their trades, not easily surpassed. This they could not do, if in the state of oppression and degradation represented by those ignorant of the institution. And such results illustrate the beneficence of our liberal and enlightened mode of management and treatment.

* Sunday, the boy referred to, was taken from the field October, 1850, and taught by me. He gets all his forms ready, regulates the color, &c., and takes pride in doing his work well. The girl Rhoda is hired, but was taught by me, and folds, gathers and stitches pamphlets, and sews books. Both these negroes have been much improved, morally and mentally.

B. F. GRIFFIN.